ISBN 0-919359-

CEREBUS
mothers & daughters
(26)

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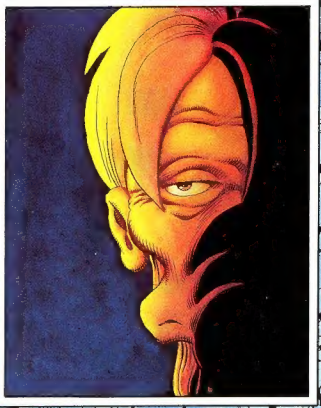

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NOV

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

Once again, a little bit of 'advanced learning'. This time I'm going to skip ahead to promoting your self-published title: whether it's only a photo-copied version, or a complete black and white with for real comic book colour cover. One of the best places to promote is the small convention — either a really small one day flea market or a one or two-day regional show. Tables are not that expensive at most of these shows. If you can't afford one of your own, you might be able to find a sympathetic store owner or dealer who'll offer to share part of one of his tables with you (a good example of the Direct Link between creators and retailers in action). How a self-publisher 'works' a convention spells the difference between success and failure. It is very easy to be defeatist in the early stages. I remember gong to a local Toronto Con with Deni when the second issue came out: we had exactly two issues and a terrible Frazetta rip-off poster to sell. I remember being enraged (ENRAGED) when Marvel zombies would throw their coats on top of our little piles of Cerebus 1 and 2 while they pawed through long-boxes at the adjacent table. Yes, most people at a comic book convention are looking for 'hot' comics from Image, Valiant, Dark Horse, et al. You don't have much artillery to work with; a couple of issues of a completely unknown comic book. You have to generate interest, somehow.

There is something you can do, and that's draw. It is an effective weapon particularly in this day and age when most dealers go to cons to dump unsaleable comics from Image, Valiant, Dark Horse et al for as much as 80% off cover price. Fans and collectors pay a few dollars to get in and most of them have found everything they're going to find that is of interest to them in the first twenty minutes or half an hour. If it took them forty minutes to get there by bus or their parents have dropped them off or they are only there to get an autograph or two from the Hot Artist du Jour, the odds are they will look around for another half hour or so before admitting that the whole expedition was a waste of time. If you are drawing, and if your chair is turned sideways so they can *see* that you're drawing, the odds are that they will watch you draw for a while. They will flip through the comics you have for sale and then most of them will walk away. But not all of them. Typical questions: 'What are you drawing?' answer 'Sketches, I give them away to anyone who buys a copy of my book. You want one?' or 'Can you draw Wolverine?' answer 'No, but if you get me reference I'll draw one of my characters in a Wolverine costume'. It is important not to draw actual super-heroes unless you combine them with what you're selling. There are a lot of Cerebus as American Flagg, Cerebus as Jon Sable, Cerebus as Nick Fury sketches floating around from ten years ago. If the convention is really slow or really busy, you should always make that first 'free with a copy of my self-published title' sketch the best that you can do. It is worth drawing your character in a Spawn costume or Batman's new costume, quickly enough so that the people watching know what you're doing, but carefully enough so they are tempted to shell out $2.25 or $2.95 for your book to get a sketch 'like that one you just did, but can you make it Venom instead?'. If you get to the convention early enough, you can even hand out 'free sketch' coupons to the people waiting in line, along with a flyer advertising your book. If you do a 'really cool' drawing for the first five kids, they will show everyone else what they got. Go around to all the dealers before or after the show: find out who has a store and ask them if they would like a drawing autographed to the store in exchange for buying, say, five copies of your book. At least get a business card and name from them so you can send them sample copies of future issues. When you book your table, ask if you can get the table next to the Hot Artist du Jour so his line passes in front of you. In 1979 Deni and I had the table next to John Byrne at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair and we made a fortune on back issues and sketches (as an aside, John was dong X-men sketches and since I had a set of markers with me to colour my own sketches, his fans started asking if I would colour his sketches. I told them they were John's sketches and it wouldn't be right for me to colour them, right, John? 'Hey, if you can make some money, why not?' I'll always be grateful to him for that). At joint signings with other self-publishers now, I make sure that their table is before mine so that they have a 'shot' at the fans on their way by.

The basic point is that you can go to a convention, set up your table and sit there obviously hating everyone and everything within sight assuring yourself all the while that your stuff is just too good for these low-life fanboys: or, you can decide to take a few positive steps towards creating a core following that you can build on in the years to come.

Hey, it's up to you.

CEREBUS

NO. 176 NOVEMBER 1993

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

•

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)

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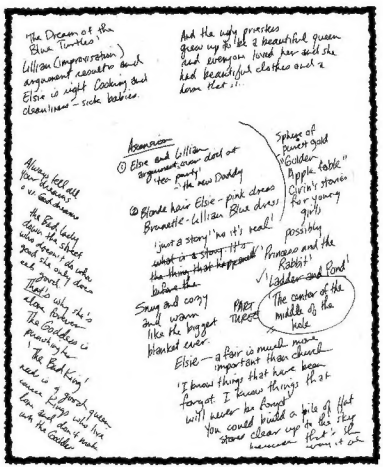
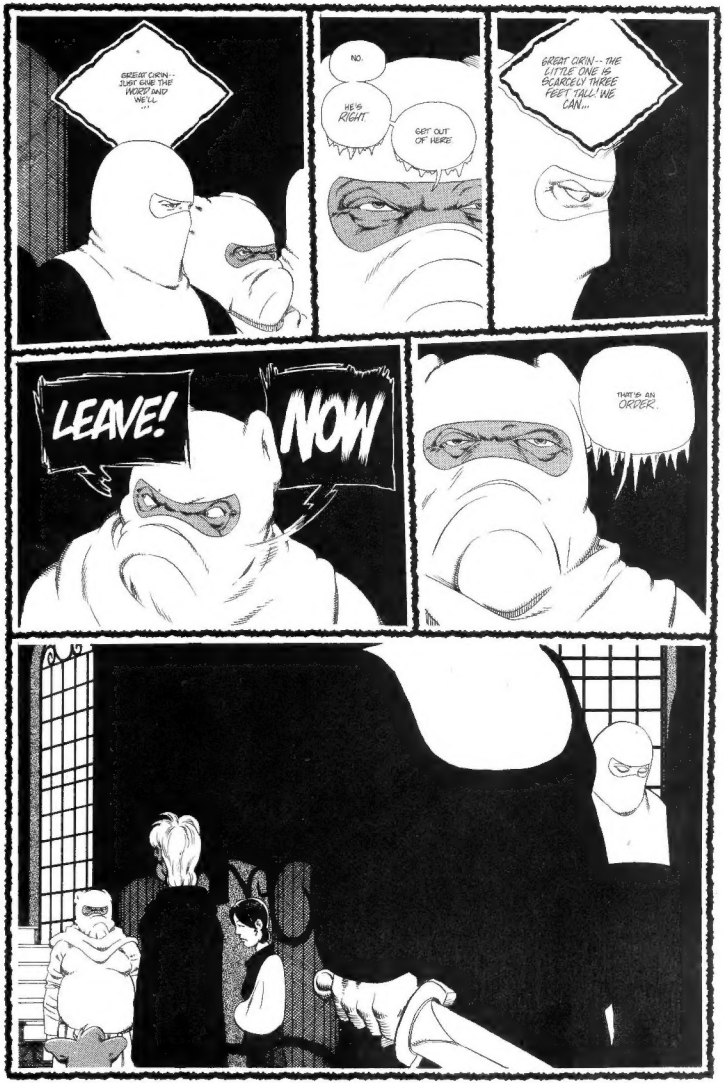
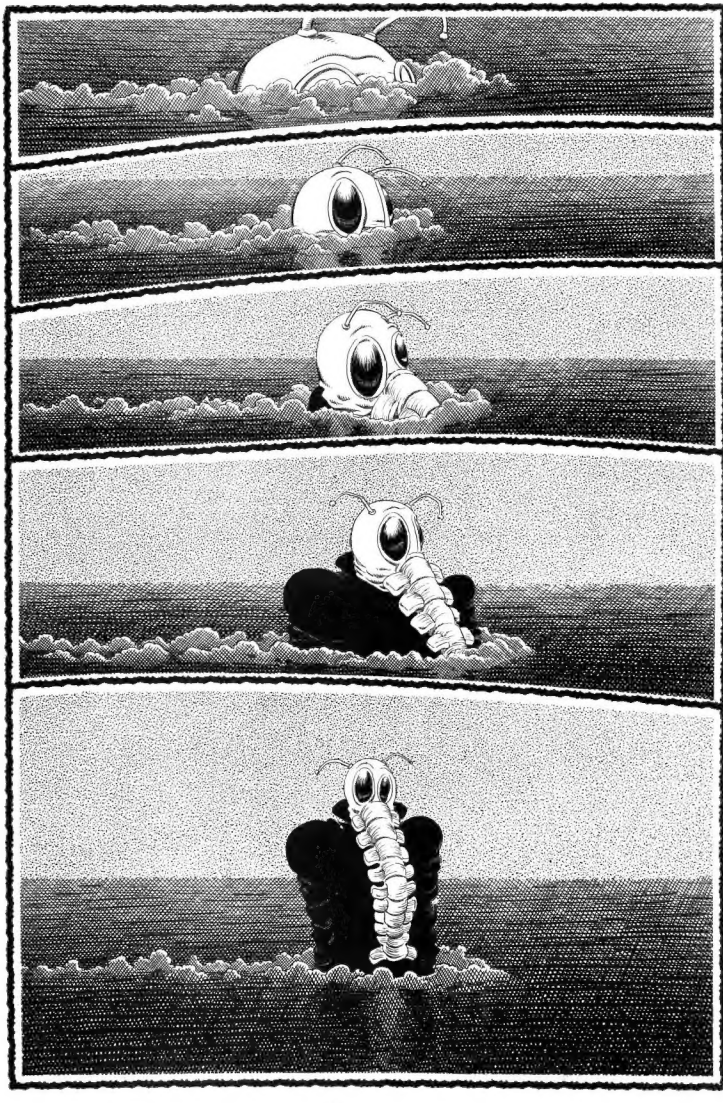

The Dream of the Blue Turtles
Lillian (improvisation)
argument resolution and
Elsie is right. Cooking and
cleanliness - sick babies
And the ugly prickles
grew up to be a beautiful queen
and everyone loved her - sold the
bad beautiful clothes and a
bean that ...
Always tell all
your children
a wild dream
The Bad lady
down the street
was dragged off
and the only dress
she owned
Thanks why the is
alone forever
The Goddess is
Punish for
The Bad King
made a good queen
cause Kings only love
bean dead and make
with the Goddess
Animation
① Elsie and Lillian
argument over dad at
the party
- the new Daddy
② Blonde hair Elsie - pink dress
Brunette - Lillian Blue dress
'just a story' 'no it's real'
Spring and cozy
and warm
like the biggest
blanket ever
Sprigs of
sweet gold
"Golden
Apple table"
Giving stones
for young
girls
possibly
Princess and the
Rabbit
Ladder and Pond
The center of the
middle of the
hole
PEER
PRESS
Elsie - a Pair is much more
important than church
'I know things that have been
forgot. I know things that
will never be known'
You could build a pile of flat
stones clear up to the sky
however that's ... you


GREAT CHIN-- JUST GIVE THE WORD AND WE'LL...
NO.
HE'S RIGHT.
GET OUT OF HERE.
GREAT CHIN-- THE LITTLE ONE IS SCARCELY THREE FEET TALL! WE CAN...
LEAVE!
NOW
THAT'S AN ORDER.

'AND THEN THERE WERE FOUR'...
YES.
'AND THEN THERE WERE FOUR'
A MALE NUMBER.
THE NUMBER OF THE EMPEROR
THE KING.
SOON... THERE WILL BE THREE... A FEMALE NUMBER. THE NUMBER OF THE EMPRESS.
THE QUEEN
THE NUMBER OF...
CHANGE

ASTORIA
CIRIN.
YOU WOULD DO WELL TO CONSIDER THIS: OF THE THREE OF YOU, OUR YOUNG FRIEND HERE
IS THE ONLY ONE WHOSE CLAIM TO THE PAPAL THRONE DOES NOT ORIGINATE IN BLOODSHED...
YOU HAVE BOTH UNDERESTIMATED HIM AT EVERY TURN...
YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS HIM REMAINS PATRONIZING...
ARROGANT.
YOU ARE AT HIS MERCY, NOW. IF YOU ARE NOT WISE ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE THAT FACT...
IT WILL SURELY COST YOU YOUR LIVES...
YOU ARE WOMEN. CUNNING... DECEIT... TREACHERY... MANIPULATION ...GUILE... THESE ARE YOUR STOCK-IN-TRADE.
BUT, THEY MAKE A POOR SHIELD AGAINST A HARD BLADE AND A MURDEROUS IMPULSE.



THE GAME IS NOW CEREBUS'S-- AS THEY SAY-- TO WIN OR LOSE...
AND YOU, PO?
WHAT IS YOUR GAME?
BALANCE?..
I PREVENTED -- OR, PERHAPS, MERELY DELAYED... ASTORIA'S EXECUTION.
I HAVE BROUGHT THE THREE OF YOU TOGETHER...
WHY.

TO BREAK THE CYCLE ASTORIA...
CAPTOR AND CAPTURED
ACCUSER AND ACCUSED
EXECUTIONER AND EXECUTED
LOOK.
THE THRONE
BLASPHEMY SORCERY
WHAT IS TRUTH?
ECHOES.
ECHOES, ASTORIA.
THEY CAN'T HURT YOU.

ECHOES POP
ILLUSIONS YOU MEAN..
I HAVE ADDRESSED YOUR PREJUDICES ALREADY..
AT MY INVITATION YOU HAVE READ MY MIND - MY HISTORY
YOU HAVE FOUND CHESS THERE
AND NOTHING..
NOTHING
..BESIDES
IF YOU HAVE ANYTHING MEANINGFUL TO CONTRIBUTE
DO SO..
IF NOT THEN BE SILENT
WHERE WAS I? ..
CEREBUS HAS THEM BOTH AT HIS MERCY.
AH!

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave,

Thank you so much for reprinting the cover to ZIRCUS's single "My Astoria" in Aardvark Comment. As a result, I've gotten inquiries from all over the place and judging from the positive responses I've gotten so far, a lot of satisfied customers.

At first I was amazed that anyone wrote at all. Then, after a little arithmetic, I realized that (according to rough estimates) less than 1% of your readership had responded to my letter. Even taking into account *Cerebus* readers who a) didn't read Aardvark Comment; b) don't like writing letters; c) are just lazy; d) are dirt poor; or e) didn't find our single likely to be to their taste, the response seemed relatively small. I assume *Cerebus* fans are generally a pretty art-supportive bunch, particularly for grass-roots level stuff, so what, I wondered to myself, could account for such a puny response? Then it struck me.

Vinyl. The product I was offering was vinyl.

Ya know, I work in a record store and we sell vinyl records all the time, but we still get people once in a while who are amazed that anyone "still makes those things", as though they were looking at Edison cylinders or something. I listen to records, always have, always will, five years ago everyone else did too. So what happened? Did everyone's turntables suddenly evaporate? Did all those records you enjoyed for so many years suddenly render themselves unlistenable? I've heard so many people say that they don't listen to vinyl anymore with the same disdainful tone they use to dismiss black and white films or the original Star Trek series: suggesting that they not only consider them worthless antiques, but kind of embarrassing and annoying as well.

I'm not a vinyl purist. CDs are good for many things — easily portable, good for extra-long re-issues of hard-to-find albums, and there are many things (anything produced by the *Bomb Squad*, say) that sound much better on CD. But the reverse is equally true and don't let any smarmy double think convince you otherwise! (Brian Wilson's mid period production masterpieces sound like dogshit when digitalized. That's fucking sacrilege!) And I'm sure everyone knows that you can fuck up CDs about as easily as vinyl. The most offensive thing about CDs, however, is the utter Big Brotherness of it all: not only have the powers that be flim-flammed you into buying all your old records again, but anything they choose not to release on CD might as well not exist to the public-at-large, giving them the ability to rewrite musical history any way they choose. Once DAT tapes or SCHMAT tapes or whatever even more "superior" formats come out (and you know it's gonna be soon and regularly) you'll all be scrambling to buy "Sgt. Pepper" for the umpteenth time while I pick up piles of your now-suddenly unlistenable CDs at dirt cheap prices. Ha, ha, ha. It is to laugh.

Hm

Well, now that I've thoroughly alienated my target audience, I'll get right to the point. If you're interested in obtaining a recording of ZIRCUS's "My Astoria", but ain't vinyl friendly, it is now available on a 14-song (almost an hour!) hi-bias cassette for $6.50. Our single (3 songs purple vinyl, Dave Sim artwork) is still available for $4.00 (postage included), and the single and tape together can be had for a mere $10.00. (Overseas orders: add $1.00 — if this proves difficult or unwieldy, drop me a line anyway. We can work something out.) Checks should be made payable to me and sent to the following address.

Anyway Dave, thanks again. For everything. You rule.

Sincerely,

Joshua Pollock
40 Grattan St.
San Francisco, CA
USA 94117

P.S. Rohan, it's beautiful!!

Now that Joshua has gone to the trouble of alienating all of you I think you owe it to him: yes, OWE it to him to buy copies of 'My Astoria' on cassette and vinyl. Lots of copies. You should all become distributors and A&R or R&R people or whatever those greasy guys with the payola are called. We're letting ZIRCUS down, folks. The only real Aardvark Comment band in the world and I haven't heard their single once (not ONCE) on a major market FM station (of course I don't listen to radio stations, but that's not really the point here) (what is the point?) The point is that if you guys are all the major cutting edge, trooly alternative, cool, cooler, kullest music fans then there should be no problem in making 'My Astoria' a must-have, must play selection at *your* favourite radio station.

Or something like that. I forget.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim:

I used to think that the phrase "graphic novel" was just another Eighties pop-culture buzzword — like "performance art", or "postmodernism", or "Madonna". Last Christmas a friend gave me her definitive *Cerebus* collection (*Swords* #1 thru 6, and individual issues thru #161). Homebound by a cold, I read the whole stack; and roughly midway through *Church and State* it came to me: "graphic *novel!* — novel, as in Dickens, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Paul Scott!" *Cerebus* is well read, well thought out, well drawn — in sum, impressively well done.

Now I'm fawning over you for a reason (as Bambi's mother said.) I do a Sunday evening radio show on WXDU, the Duke University student station; and this is an open invitation for you and Gerhard to be my guests thereon, the next time a tour brings you through the area. Guests on my show are allowed to seize control of our airwaves, cruising our record library for the ideal music sets they always wanted to hear but never could. In between sets, we hang out and talk about

their key interest, and whatever else comes to mind. WXDU specializes in new alternative music, but has a sufficient archive of the *Stones, Clapton, Hendrix,* etc. (So I am talking at you college radio, college radio, college radio! On which could be self-broadcasting Famous the Dave Sim and Famous the Gerhard! — oops, sorry.) I'd be honored to have you; I'll watch Aardvark Comment for a yea or nay.

The enclosed photo is from *Time* magazine of August 30 this year, and shows Cerebus, incognito, on *Late Night with David Letterman.* He's trying to retrieve his sword, which Letterman has kicked under the desk

Respectfully yours,

Marty Smith
1010 Hale Street
Durham, NC
USA 27705

Well, I'm not foolish enough to print *anything* from *Time* magazine without permission, but it is a great photo. I'll be happy to be on your radio show. Watch the personal appearances spot.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave & Ger;

I thought I'd write and say how good it was to see you guys at the London *Fantastic Store* signing recently. After queing for three hours (which would have been exasperating if it wasn't for the nice chap behind me that I got talking to – a fellow *Cerebus* fan- gosh, what a novelty to discuss aardvarks and not get odd looks!), I was rewarded with the chance to have a pleasant talk with you both, and to get a personally drawn sketch (now framed and mounted with pride). It's much nicer to wait for that length of time, knowing that you'll both spend time being 'real' people with your fans, than it is to whizz through a signing with little more than a brief nod for your time.

Oh, and seeing the proofs for the next issue was great too — loved the unexpected ending!

Thanks again. See you at 300!

Best wishes.

Clive Banks
3 Taplon Court, 138 Moor Lane,
Chessington, Surrney,
K9T 2AT, England

Well, it is getting to be a bit of a balancing act. We had record crowds for a *Cerebus* signing at every stop on the UK Tour (except for the last minute Peterborough and Preston stops which were a welcome relief). Just Cerebus or a Jaka head sketch (and Gerhard bricks) and quick autographs on everything else. The Nottingham signing ran six and a half hours (hi, Mark! Hi, Stephen!). I'd sure hate to have to phase out the head sketches but something's got to give at some point.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Needless to say, I've been reading *Cerebus* forever. I have recently moved onto a college campus, and was pleased to find that 3 local stores religiously carry my favorite aardvark. It's good to see support for this and other indie comics around.

I recently went home to Louisville, KY and drove by my old comic haunt, and there was Cerebus, standing full form and life size (I guess . . .) in the window display. He had on a vest, medallions, and was wielding his famous sword against a collection of mainstreams, (including *Wolverine, Punisher,* and other) who were depicted cringing in fear behind a rock. The sign said "Celebrating 15 Years with Cerebus". It was great, and they turned down my offer of $100 for the Cerebus. The guy who made the display wanted to keep it. The next week, I found the ad enclosed in a local alternative newspaper. I thought the support that this great store gives to the different types of comics might raise the spirits of my favorite writers and illustrators.

My roommate does not understand "this whole Cerebus thing" as he calls it, and he never will. I just tell him not to touch anything, and he keeps his drunken preppie frat hands outta my stacks.

Again, thanks for a great book, and my meager bit of leisure from the college thing.

Oh, whatever . . .

Aaron Morris
University of Kentucky

P.S. I remember taking a trip to Bloomington, IN to see Dave Sim, and doing so at a little comic store called *25th Century,* where he signed a C&S for me. Sigh . . . and you thought that was a "minor" event.

Um, Aaron. You forgot to mention the name of the store.

★★★★★★★★★★

So I'm hacking my way through the herd at the San Diego Comic Con, grabbing as many trinkets as I can (not because I really want or have any practical use for them, but because it's just a lot of fun to take from other people) when I stumble into the heart of the *Marvel Comics* Quad (something reminiscent of strategic command centers in urban guerrilla warfare scenarios. Smelled the same anyway.) and instinctively snagged a dozen of those *X-Men-Avengers*-promotional pins. For some peculiar reason, the advertising geniuses at *Marvel Comics* chose the letters "X" and "E" to promote this X-men and avengErs 30 year gimmick thing. Perhaps they were trying to cater to the dyslexic fanboy market, I just don't know. What I am certain of is that the letters X and E are rather significant in today's youth culture and it has nothing to do with mutants. You see, the staple drug of choice among ravers, cyber club kids, and the House Nation is Ecstasy, officially known as MDMA, or more commonly referred to as just X or E. Now I'm wondering if Stan Lee might be using *Marvel Comics* to encourage drug use among the youth of today. What are your thoughts on the matter, Dave?

Mike Bolger
4016 Country Trails
Bonita, CA
USA 91902

Stan Lee has about as much to do with the day-to-day running of *Marvel Comics* as I do, Mike. My guess would be that whatever Gods are in charge of stupid, self-destructive corporations thought it would be a bit of a giggle to plant the idea in some marketing guy's brain.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

On Long Island, *Cerebus* readers are few and far between. My local store in Farmingdale receives about four copies, and after I buy mine, the rest collect dust on their shelves. Now, imagine this: I am a tenth grader in a high school of X-Anything and Image fans. It's pretty brutal. Anyhow, I try to spread the gospel of the earth-pig born by bringing him into conversations. People get confused and my explaining doesn't help. In my Humanities class (that's a social studies/English double period for us smart guys), we often do group work. Well, I convinced

my three female group members (I feel like Julius in a room full of Cirinists) to call the group "The Flying Aardvarks", and now, I get to put drawings of Cerebus on the wall next to my desk. Pretty neat, huh? Hey, no one's gonna laugh at me for saying 'neat', right? I should hope not.

Well, Dave, mainly I wanted to let you know that at least one high school student (albeit a Mensa member) reads *Cerebus*. I just happen to have been born in December of 1977. Now, that's neat. Hey, can we, like, talk about the storyline in Aardvark Comment? I don't think anyone's had the balls to do it since 1987. Well, here it goes: Wow, Cerebus can fly! His infallible papal powers have returned! How is infallible defined, anyway? Cerebus raped Astoria! Arrest him! I think I'm getting behind myself . . .

Sincerely,

Damin Toell
53 Lockwood Ave.
South Farmingdale, NY
USA 11735

P.S. If you print this letter, it would be an invaluable tool in converting the follows of the Big M.

P.P.S. No comments on biting off female anatomy from now on, okay? Now, wives cutting off penises of husbands who raped them are another subject entirely.

That's impossible. Why, someone who was born in December, 1977 would only be . . . uh . . . only be . . . (Jeez I feel old).

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I just finished reading issue #16-something, in which you were discussing *Cerebus Number Zero*, and it is not working out as hoped., Not giving a shit about white/gold logos, poly bagging collector stuff, I won't comment on that, but the basic idea behind *Zero* is *perfect*. I bought *Zero* about three months ago and I am now a dedicated reader after *years* of not buying comics.

The last time I regularly read comics was when I was ten. I stopped abruptly when the prices went up, because *no* comic was worth 40¢. Years after that someone lent me *Dark Knight*. I almost got interested, I went out and bought *Batman: Year One*. I remember thinking 'Hey, this is great writing! I can't believe I missed all of this". Then I bought *Year Two*. I realize your bud Todd drew it, or some of it, or something, but the writing was some of the worst shit . . . well that went by and largely killed my comic buying days. I read someone's *Watchmen*, and I said to myself (I talk to myself an awful lot, ask my wife) 'Well, that's a great story. That'll be the last superhero story I ever read.' And it was.

Over the years I have read a few comics, mostly Japanese, of my friends' collections, but only 3 stood out: *Concrete, Love & Rockets*, and these three issues (151–3 I think) of *Cerebus*. Those three issues really intrigued me (though I didn't know what the hell was going on) and stuck in my memory for a couple of years.

Anyway, January or February '93 I'm in a second hand bookstore looking for Volume 4 of *Anais Nin's Diary*, and I find a waterstained mangled copy of the complete *V for Vendetta* for like $3. I bought it, read it, loved it. But for shame! I, an adult with impoverished but snobby taste, have bought a comic book.

A couple months later (I'm getting to the end of this moronic talk, I promise) I'm in the *Silver Snail* looking. *Love & Rockets* is just finishing off some long-running stories, about to begin more. Fine, I can buy it (having read enough before to understand who's what, etc.). Concrete is publishing *Eclectica*. Fine. *Cerebus*, though, is in the middle of an extended story within a running epic! Reference point! I was really interested in trying at *Cerebus* but had no *idea* where to start. Coming to terms with the idea of shelling out for a phone book, I looked for the first one, *Cerebus*. Luckily, I couldn't find it (see below, this is not an insult, but rather a compliment). In the midst of my confusion, I find *Cerebus Number Zero*. It was exactly what I needed, and instantly hooked someone who gave up on comics a long time ago. Thank you.

One thing I'd like to disagree with you about though. In your intro to *Zero* you state that new readers should read back until they've "caught up" with the storyline. This would not have worked with me. After *Zero* I decided to buy the phone books at a rate I could afford, but also buy current issues. I went to the last phone book which is *Flight*. Found it ended at #162, and then bought (at a rate I could afford) #163 through to current #173. I'm very glad I did this. Although I don't understand all of *Mothers and Daughters*, I can enjoy it eeeeemensely, and look forward to understanding that which I currently don't. If I hadn't done that, I would just have started with *Cerebus* which did not excite me. Sorry. I may well have stopped there had I not known how good your writing was going to get. Yes, I really didn't like *Cerebus*, though it does work, I guess, as the building blocks for greater things (kinda like Duplo™). Your writing exploded into brilliance (how's that for FANBOY?) with *High Society* and has been wonderful ever since. I can't wait to get my raise so I can buy *Church and State*.

Gee. Four pages to say thank you for *Cerebus Number Zero*. Kinda rambling, but the work day is almost done, and since this letter ends with it (talk about deadlines!) I want to quickly comment on the content.

Back in issue #166, you and a reader "discuss" whether or not the everchanging Parody Roach is an in-joke or not. Well, as a long time non-comic reader, I often "don't get it" but I rarely care. Roach works whether I get the reference (Cockroach the original, Captain Roach, Punisher Roach) or not (Swoon?). What I don't get I ask collectors of the parochial work to explain, but even that's unneeded. One of my favorite writers is D.M. Thomas, who makes hundreds of sly references to Russian poets and authors, none of which I catch. But I don't need to because the references work on another level that I can appreciate, as does Roach. (Side note: Is DC really publishing a monthly title about a guy who masturbates all day? Wow! Things sure have changed since *Weird War* and *Sgt. Rock!*)

And finally, when my wife asked me if a comic book really should be on the same bookshelf as my other books (Shakespeare and Shelley on one side, Swift, D.M. Thomas and Jim Thompson on the other). She was referring to it losing value (I don't poly bag anything! Books are to be read), I said to her, and myself, yes. It deserves to be there. On that shelf. It just looks right. Of course I also smile because by the fluke of the bookcases, it is also within six inches of my collection of *Ms* magazines and within a couple feet

of several books by Andrea Dworkin. I don't kpow how you or Andrea feel about it, but I like it eeeeemensely! Well, I'm outta here, maybe I'll look for a *Hepcats* on the way home. Thanks again for opening up a whole new medium for me.

Later, Dave.

Lee Triplett

P.S. Who is Gary Groth, anyway? And Kim? And Larry, Rob, and Nicole? Gee. Literature and soap opera in 32 pages every month. Doesn't get any better, does it?

The success of *Cerebus Zero* in getting people interested in *Cerebus* has certainly exceeded my wildest expectations. *Free Cerebus* was a bit of a false start on the road towards it. I'm only sorry I couldn't give Dave Campbell, the catalyst for the whole idea, credit while he was still with us (see 'In Memoriam' below).

IN MEMORIAM

On Friday, October 1, 1993 a very special person and dear friend to many passed away.

His name was Dave Campbell, and he was only 24.

It came suddenly and unexpectedly, and was a great shock to everyone.

He worked at Unicorn Comics for close to five years, and been a very avid comic collector for about eighteen years. Those who knew him will remember, beyond a doubt, that Cerebus was his favorite. He was quite excited each time he had the chance to see Dave Sim.

He will be greatly missed by his family and his friends with whom he always had the time to talk or help with a problem, but none more so than myself. He was a kindred spirit to me, and I'll miss his smiling face, weird humor, and strong friendship. He was my best friend, and he won't be forgotten.

Goodbye Dave.

We love you.

SHAWN DUVAL
Manager, *Unicorn Comics*

Hey Dave,

I've been meaning to write since my last letter, since it never saw print (not that that's important). I have no way of saying all that I need in a flowing letter, so I'll break it up.

1. My boss saw you at the Capital City thing, and you signed his picture (the one with Colleen Doran and others) He gave it to me. What a great boss!! (Jim Jones of *Comic Quest*, Evansville, IN, two locations) I believe he asked you if you ever get tired of drawing Cerebus. A fair question when you think about it, and I'm glad the answer wasn't "yes".
2. Was that original, that "if the masses aren't starving they aren't going to storm the Bastille"? If not, who said it first? If so . . . wow.
3. You're being very unfair in your estimation of Hillary Clinton and to the role of women in government. If my father were dying, I would sit at the bedside, in fact I never even had that opportunity. The health care plan and the country are still going to be there when it's over. Two weeks don't make a damn bit of difference in a program that's already long overdue. Besides, whether it's for the "public good" or not remains to be seen.
4. I'm curious as to how many readers are out there who've been reading from the first year until now. I haven't (I joined up when *Cerebus Bi-Weekly* #1 came out) I just think it would be interesting, statistically speaking.
5. 300! 300! 300! I'm tired of all the readers and everybody talking about issue #300. Half the readers sign off with "Be here until #300" or some variation. It's becoming as sickening as Make Mine Marvel. Issue #300 isn't for another twelve years or so. Could everyone lay off for awhile, maybe until the 230's or something? What if 300 sucks? Not that it will, but what a downer. This is nothing against you Dave, it's nice to have goals, I'm just sick of the bandwagon mentality

I'll be here next issue, and all the issues after that, but I'm not going to say you know what I'll also gladly support any other work you have a hand in (like *Starchild* #0).

Matt Tauber
Moore N310
400 S. Rotherwood Avenue
Evansville, IN
USA 47714

1. **No, I never get tired of drawing Cerebus, either the character or the comic book. I look on it as I 'get to' draw Cerebus, not I 'have to' draw Cerebus.**
2. **I think it's original, but I always write the Note from the President and the Aardvark Comment answers off the top of my head and the top of head is a noted, albeit unconscious, plagiarist.**
3. **I stand by my original assertion. Difference of opinion.**
4. **How about if I ask them all to send in postcards? Anyone who started reading *Cerebus* between issue 1 and 6. I'll print a list of names in a future issue.**
5. **Well, *you* don't have to say it, but I think for a lot of them it's cool to have something to look forward to a decade from now. I mean, just imagine what the Fall 2003 TV season is going to look like. Yecch.**

★★★★★★★★★★

My dear Mr. Sim,

All right! All right! Raise the cover price a quarter! These cost-cutting moves of yours must stop! Not only were those intricate illuminated letters out of your budget in issue 172, but you couldn't even afford to use Cerebus, your putative star, this time. You're breaking my heart.

Falling for your scheme.

David Allen
7 Howard St., Apt. 5
Petaluma, CA
USA 94952

P.S. Thought you'd appreciate the enclosed, from *Rotten Rejections* (Pushcart Press, 1990).

The quote that David sent along is from George Bernard Shaw:

I finished my first book seventy-six years ago. I offered it to every publisher on the English-speaking earth I had ever heard of. Their refusals were unanimous: and it did not get into print until, fifty years later, publishers would publish anything that had my name on it . . .

I object to publishers: the one service they have done me is to teach me to do without them. They combine commercial

rascality with artistic touchiness and pettishness, without being either good business men or fine judges of literature. All that is necessary in the production of a book is an author and a bookseller, without the intermediate parasite.

That GBS sure knew how to turn a phrase, didn't he?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave Sim, Cerebus Gerhard, fans, etc.

I have always known that at last
I would take this road but
Yesterday I did not know that it
would be today

I am not normally a fan of poetry, but I read this on a bus one day, and it captured with beautiful simplicity a message I had been trying to express for a long time. I open my letter with it, as this, like most things in my life, is about change.

I have never written a fan letter before. I've had a letter to *Cerebus* in the works for several months now, but until today I did not have a compelling reason to complete it and send it off. I just finished *Mothers and Daughters*, numbers 22 and 23; the last section of 23 was read at breakneck speed, with my heart pounding (Death?? Astoria?? Cirin?? Cerebus?? Aaack!!). It was moving; moving enough to inspire me into writing this letter. Though your comic is, quite simply, wonderful in just about every way, and an excellent reason for me to spend more of my pittance of an income than I can really afford, this letter is not solely for the purpose of singing your praises. I beg your indulgence to tell a story, and send a message.

It began almost a year ago, when I walked into a comic store, and with no warning or foreknowledge, bought my first copy of *Cerebus*. I had heard about it before, I think. Mostly, as I recall, it was the cover that attracted my attention. The story captivated me; within three months I was an addict, and I have bought several of the books, catching up slowly but steadily. It is hard to remember a time before I read *Cerebus*. It is now as much a part of my life as the *Renaissance Pleasure Faire* and *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*.

1993 has been an eventful year for me. The theme of the year is radical change and momentous events. It is making me into a different person, but I believe the person I am becoming is much more awake than the last one. Among other things, it was in this year that I met, and fell in love with, the person I am trying to contact.

There are many kinds of people in the world. There are sheep, who follow blindly; there are energy sources, who attract a lively crowd wherever they go. There are mountains, rivers, and catalysts who make things happen without meaning to. He is the rarest kind of person; a thinking man, who lives as he thinks and as he believes. Where most stumble blindly through life, and some, like myself, struggle to see, he moves with a deliberate grace that gives me hope that there is something there in the darkness. Though he denies his light, with modesty and brooding nihillism, it still shines. And after meeting him, learning to respect him, growing to love him after three scant months, he vanished. I knew he was going; he had told me as much. As a parting gift, among a few personal items, I gave him my copy of the first *Cerebus* book, in the hope that he would find the common thread in it and understand a little more of my world. I have not heard from him since. In the same month of his departure, I moved to a new address, my old phone number was disconnected and the Post Office continues stubbornly refusing to forward my mail. If he does have any intentions of contacting me again (which I like to believe he does), he will probably have no easy way of doing so.

If he continued to read *Cerebus;* if he buys this issue; if this letter is printed; if he reads the letters column. This is the tenuous thread upon which I dangle this message.

Dear George Stevens:

Please contact me. I never want our discussions to end. You are not forgotten. I will always love you.

Thank you, to all who made this message possible; especially Dave and Gerhard, for providing me with the wonderful, intelligent, captivating, evocative Cerebus. I hope to share your legacy with many more potential readers; I'll be with you to issue 300.

Hail Eris! Kallisti

Erin Smith
1736 10th Avenue
Oakland, CA
USA 94606

P.S. Just to reassure "anybody" that might have wondered, I am not pining away. Life remains wild, unpredictable, and fun as hell! which is the way it should be.

A warning to all *Cerebus* fan Vagabond Lover Types: they've figured out a way to track you down, lads. Keep a low profile and I promise I won't blow the whistle on you. Hey, case in point . . .

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

A woman w/an intriguing accent is biting my arm. — Thank you.

I met Avril thru issue #151 where she and I each had a letter published. I liked hers so much, I tossed her off a drunken page of non-sequiturs. And, to my surprise, she wrote me back. We've been writing each other ever since. Two years. And now she's in my bed.

For 3 weeks. Then she slides south to meet her other *Cerebus* pen pal, Nik. It's weird.

Sorry Dave, Rob had to stop writing, he's about to come. Thanks for Aardvark Comment, it has made my life much more interesting.

Later pumpkin,

Avril Siddell

Rob Lavendar

Now, junior, behaaave yourself.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave . . .

Life stinks!

I recently went to Edinburgh with my job. Found two comics shops there, and got me some back-issues of *Cerebus*. On the Sunday the 19th of September we spent 8 hours on a bus sightseeing while driving to Aberdeen to catch the plane back to Norway . . .

Two days after returning to Norway, I get my monthly comics-dose. Living in Norway means I have to order all my foreign comics from the States, which creates a minor delay in getting the comics. In particular I got the July issue of *Cerebus* . . . And what do I see on the back cover: Personal appearances by Dave Sim in the UK . . . Aberdeen 19th of September!!! So close and yet so far away! That was probably my only chance for me to meet you in person and maybe get an original head sketch, since you probably never will go on a signing trip in Norway . . .

On the other hand, life isn't all bad. In fact life's rather good at the moment. Since my last letter to you, about 2 years ago, I've gotten myself a new girlfriend (Hi, Elisabeth!). I just thought you'd like to know it.

Another good thing happened to me recently as well. Somebody in Stavanger (where I live), must have been a big fan of *Cerebus*, because I found *Swords of Cerebus* Vol. 1–6 (including the addition to Vol. 6) at the local used comics shop. And they were only about $4.00 each!! Life is good!

In closing I would like to add that I still enjoy *Cerebus* as much as I did when I first discovered him those 2 years ago. Keep up the good work!!

Sincerely,

Morten S. Eriksen
Hustuftene 35
4041 Hafrsfjord
Norway

P.S. Why does everybody call you "Mr. Sims" in *Spawn*? Inquiring minds would like to know!

Probably because the Toddmeister calls me 'Dave Sims'. It's one of those 'jock' things to put an 's' on the end of a short name. Hey, as long as they give *Cerebus* a try I don't care *what* they call me.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

First, let me say how great it was seeing you at the last UKCAC. I mean, here was a guy who'd been doing virtually the same sketch over and over again for a bunch of people he'd never seen before, and yet he's still able to smile and shake my hand when I come up and start asking stupid questions about Cerebus' father! At most signings I've been to all I get is a half-hearted grin and weary scribble.

But what I'm really writing to you about is the guy I stood next to in the queue. This guy was representative of quite a few people at the convention: a fanboy deluxe who spends virtually his whole salary on comics and related goodies. We struck up a conversation with me giving him a bit of background about *Cerebus* (he'd only come to the signing because he'd seen Cerebus in *Spawn*) and other independents.

Unfortunately, the gist of what I was saying didn't seem to register, as he kept dragging the conversation back to obscure mainstream characters I'd never heard of and didn't want anything to do with. Being polite, though (one of my major weaknesses), I kept listening, and well, what can I say, this guy really had been taken in by the whole industry. The high-point of the day had been buying an over-priced jacket with 'Star Trek' painted on the back — and this had been something he'd been looking forward to for ages.

What can I say? Should I just have told him, "Look, mate, they're just ripping you off for as much as they can." or "I'm sure it's fascinating, but I stopped reading that sort of comic when I was eleven years old." In the end I said neither (though I dropped a few heavy hints about who was actually benefitting from his devotion), and got him to give me a page from his sketch book so you could scribble on it.

It worries me though, I mean, you can't really criticise people like this: it's their money, and if they want to spend it all on half-baked fantasies and trinkets, that's their business. But anyone from outside comics would probably have found the crazed intensity a bit frightening, and that's what worries me the most. Still, there is always hope — the guy I was speaking to seemed impressed at the number of people who'd turned up for the signing and may well try out a few issues of *Cerebus* — there's always a chance for redemption.

One other thing, a guy from Glasgow said you'd been giving out gold copies of *Cerebus Zero* at the signings up there, and yet you didn't at UKCAC, aagh! I can understand why you didn't give them out there as you'd have had a hoard of speculators descend on your table, but it might have been nice to let the real *Cerebus* fans know in advance, then I'd have gone to one of the other signings instead.

Yours,

Charles King
3, Woodlands Court,
New Wanstead Rd.,
Wanstead,
London
E11 2SR
UK

Well, it's the old 'idealism' thing, isn't it? I have a lot clearer picture of JFK now that the dirty laundry has been coming home to roost (to mix a metaphor) but that doesn't affect the *idea* of JFK that I've had since I was a wee tad.

And we did hand out twenty five gold logos at the Con; they disappeared in about seven seconds.

★★★★★★★★★★

DAVE SIM PERSONAL APPEARANCES

1993

NOVEMBER 26
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Central City Comics

NOVEMBER 27, 28
COLUMBUS, OHIO
Mid-Ohio Con.

DECEMBER 11
KITCHENER, ONTARIO
Now & Then Books

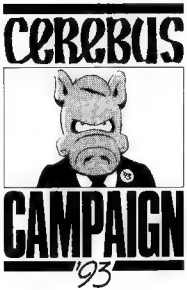
1994
with GERHARD

SAN JUAN CONVENTION

JANUARY 15, 16
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO
Gran Salon
Convention Center

OZCON III

FEBRUARY 18–20
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
Park Lane Hotel
161 Elizabeth Street



'Sales of quality independents have been on the upswing all summer.'

For the final instalment of Campaign '93, I'd like to give the last word to John Tinkess, senior manager of *Another Dimension Comics* in Calgary, Alberta. I think he sums up quite nicely the spirit of optimism and change that I have seen throughout the course of Tour '92 and Campaign '93. 'Aardvarks Over UK Tour' posters are available from Stephen Holland c/o Fantastic Store, 48, Friar Lane, Nottingham, England NG1 6DQ or you can just blow up the image from the back cover on a colour photocopier. Just show your local quick printer this column.

Ahem.

Attention, printers. As the creator of Cerebus the Aardvark, I hereby authorize any and all use of the characters and images contained in *Cerebus* for use in promotion by comic book stores, their owners and managers, without royalty or compensation of any kind. Please feel free to contact me at 519-576-0610 (phone) or 519-576-0955 (fax) if you need written confirmation of this.

Ladies and gentlemen, my good friend, John Tinkess:

Dear Dave;

I was a little embarrassed when I realized that it was now September and I still hadn't written to thank you for the great signing you did in our store back in April. In the days that followed, I had a chance to gather opinions from customers and the comment I heard most often was that this signing was quite different from most they had attended elsewhere in the past. Instead of a quick hello and a signature, you took the time to do a head sketch for everyone in line and made each one feel comfortable talking to you at the table. Thanks for making this event such a success.

On a somewhat related topic, I've noticed an interesting trend happening in our stores (and from the sound of it across the industry) over the summer. People are finally getting fed up with Marvel and Image, but rather than just switching their loyalties to one of the other major publishers, they are now looking to some of the smaller companies and self-publishers for something to read (yes, read!). If someone had told me six months ago that customers would be dropping "hot" titles and replacing them with *Madman* or *Eightball* I would have said they were crazy. Now this has become an everyday occurrence. Sales of quality independents have been on the upswing all summer, especially *Cerebus* and *Bone*.

Even though some of this sudden interest in self-published comics might have begun as sort of protest reaction to the market manipulations of the larger publishers, I think that with a little effort we can turn all of these people into long term readers. You really started the ball rolling with the tour and Campaign '93 and I think some credit is also due to the major distributors and several trade publications who have begun to give more coverage to smaller publishers. (Even *Wizard* has jumped on the bandwagon.) Let's hope this trend towards quality reading continues for a long time to come.

There's still a lot of work to be done promoting good comics and I'd like to share a few ideas with any of your readers who own or operate comic stores. Of course, the biggest thing you can do to promote a book is to read it and push it on to your customers. But, beyond that, there are a few things you need to do to attract your customer's attention. First of all, you need to make prominent displays separate from your new issue racks. By creating a separate section for books like *Cerebus, Bone, Sandman, Beanworld,* etc. you are telling your customers that these books are something special, something a little different. At the same time you are making it easier for your customers to find other titles that may be of interest to them. A reader of *Cerebus,* for example, would probably be more receptive to *Tales of the Beanworld* than to *Captain America* (which it would be displayed next to if your entire stock is alphabetical).

Secondly, you need to carry a wide variety of titles and re-order often. Many people who like independents are not typical comic buyers. They will not come in every week on new book day but more likely will come in once or twice a month. If you are ordering for a one week sell-through you're losing their business. And if you aren't carrying recent back issues and reprint volumes you'll find it much harder to get someone to try a title that's currently in the middle of a storyline. Most people are reluctant to start a new title if they believe there is little hope of finding earlier parts of the story.

Making displays for independent comics is a little more difficult since small publishers can't afford to produce many promotional posters or display dumps. But with a little effort and creativity you can usually make whatever you need. I recently created some Cerebus display dumps by photocopying and enlarging a Cerebus logo and attaching it to some old Disney dumps (of all things). The dumps look fine and now I can display *Cerebus* right on the counter where everyone will see it before leaving the store.

These ideas are pretty basic and I'm sure many of you are already doing similar things in your own stores, but I'm also sure many others are not. So why not just give it a try? What could it hurt?

Speaking of ideas, the recent "Aardvarks Over UK" ads appearing on the back of *Cerebus* have given me one. I'd like to make up a display featuring *Cerebus* and the *Vertigo* books and this image would look great as a part of it. (Can an Aardvark fly? Yes, but he gets VERTIGO!) If you have this available as a poster I'd like to find out how to get some. I would probably need about a dozen copies to do displays in all four of our stores.

Well, this letter has turned out to be a lot longer than I intended so I'd better wrap it up here. Thanks for your time.

Yours truly,

John Tinkess, Sr. Manager

Another Dimension Comics
324 10th Street N.W.
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1V8

The 1993 'Aardvarks Over UK Tour' far exceeded Gerhard's and my expectations. We'd like to thank Stephen Holland and Mark Simpson, without whom, I'm sure, everything would not have gone as smoothly and as efficiently as it did. Ger and I would both like to thank all of the fans who stood in line for hours (some for most of the day to make sure they were among the first twenty-five for a gold logo *Cerebus Number Zero*) but who were, without exception, patient and courteous.

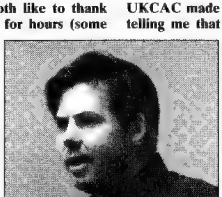


Photo by Emma Salmon.

Although I had planned to discuss, informally, the Direct Market in the one hour I was allotted on the Friday Trade and Press day, discussions with Stephen and Mark earlier in the week led me to believe that it was time, once again, to do that 'speech thing'. From what I was able to gather in the course of the UK Tour as well as in discussions with Larry Marder and a number of retailers in North America when I returned, events are moving more swiftly than any of us could have imagined. To me, this only makes the need for cooperation between retailers in the production and distribution of a 'sell-through index' an even more urgent priority.

Lou Bank, Marvel's representative at UKCAC made a special point of coming over and telling me that he had lost all respect for me for characterizing him as an 'impotent politician' in his absence (he and DC's Bob Wayne did a joint presentation after my talk reproduced here). While I regret having injured his feelings, I think that the threat to the security and viability of the Direct Market posed by Marvel's irresponsible and wholesale expansion made it necessary to address that issue in a public forum. I thank all of the retailers who voiced their support and encourage them to contact Stephen Holland at Fantastic Store 48 Friar Lane, Nottingham, ENGLAND NG1 6DQ about the formation of an organization of concerned UK retailers. Stephen can be reached at 0602 476 246.

ADDRESS TO UK RETAILERS UNITED KINGDOM COMIC ART CONVENTION

SEPTEMBER 17, 1993

I would like to thank Frank Plowright and the U.K. Comic Art Convention for this opportunity to launch the 1993 Trade and Press Day and to welcome all of you as the front-line troops, many of you grizzled and scarred veterans, in the Comic Book Direct Market European Theatre of Operations.

If that sounds a little odd, it shouldn't, because the Direct Market could best be described as the Twenty Year's War, each of us, in our own way doing battle to preserve creative freedom for our artists and writers, and to guarantee that a supply line of comic books arrive in a timely fashion on a regular basis without interruption or impediment in comic book stores throughout the English-speaking world and beyond.

It is a war that is without end, which has had more than its fair share of casualties at all levels. First Comics is gone. Longhorn Distributors, Glenwood Distributors, Big Rapids, Sea Gate and closer to home, Titan and Neptune Distributors are gone. A list of comic book stores that have closed in the last twenty years due to mismangement, over-ordering, the inability to compete, the world-wide economic malaise or combinations of those factors would run to many dozens of pages. If a memorial could one day be built with the names of your fallen comrades it is doubtful that premises large enough to contain it would exist outside of the corporate headquarters of Diamond and Capital City distributors.

And so I think today you would all do well to pause and reflect on your own success and good fortune in being here today, that you can number yourselves among the survivors of the massive, rapid and over-whelming changes of the previous year. And reflect as well on the year to come and the summer of 1994 ten months away which will doubtless test you even further than did the summer just past; testing your abilities to recognise and adjust to rapid fundamental change and expansion.

To me the greatest strength of the Direct Market and the reason that our efforts to change the perception of comic books as a bastardized children's medium have been so successful over the previous two decades is the simplicity of the rules governing the movement and exchange of goods and currency and strict adherence to those rules. So long as the world-wide distribution of comic books remains non-returnable, so long as individual stores order wisely and cautiously, so long as artists and writers adhere to their

promised deadlines and so long as publishers deliver the finished product within the universally agreed-upon 90-day window of opportunity, so long as the distributors pay the publishers and the publishers pay the creators and the stores pay the distributors in full and on time; then all is well. The supply line remains open and all levels of the direct market prosper and flourish.

I spend a great deal of time explaining to self-publishers, who have missed the 90-day window of opportunity and who have had their purchase orders cancelled, that they have no one to blame but themselves and that they can expect no sympathy from me. The Direct Market will not grind to a halt because four thousand copies of their title didn't make it into the stores. If they are not part of the solution they are part of the problem.

Of course, any smoothly functioning system is subject to abuses and that's what I'd like to discuss here today. The 90-day window of opportunity is carved in stone in the relationship between publishers and distributors. 'Deliver or die' just about sums it up, particularly as regards small and self-publishers. I have no quarrel with this. As many of you discovered a couple of years ago, when a distributor doesn't pay us, he doesn't get books. We ask no quarter and we give none.

Of course as we've seen in the last year what is good for the goose often has no application in the case of the gander. Cracks have formed in the universal rule that a book which varies from its description at the time of solicitation or a book that is more than 90 days late is fully returnable. I am thinking here of the fiasco that surrounded *Turok* #1, a book which shipped in quite different form from its solicitation but which only allowed for a percentage of returns. I'm thinking also of the numerous Image comics which shipped much later than 90 days with no returns permitted. Image comics *have* been returned and debate rages over their custody and whose responsibility they are. Because they were solicited by Malibu, to Image they are Malibu returns. To Malibu, they were done by Image creators, they are Image returns. Resolution is apt to be messy and drawn out. But these returns were almost exclusively from distributor to publisher. No provision was made for retailer return.

These two instances point out a fundamental flaw and vulnerability in the Direct Market. Put very simply, you, the retailer take all the risks in the Direct Market. If a publisher ships fifty copies of a book he gets paid for fifty copies. If a distributor ships fifty copies of a book he gets paid for fifty copies. If you order fifty copies and only sell ten you are stuck with forty copies. At a fifty per cent discount you are losing money, not to mention the tax you pay on that inventory year after year: not to mention the rent you pay to display it and then store it.

The only information available to you is the Diamond and Capital City Top 100 and these lists reflect orders alone. And orders, as you know better than anyone, are not the same as sales. A new title which appears on the list at number seven or number ten based on the number of copies ordered is often responsible for an across-the-board loss of tens of thousands of dollars at the retail level. If a sell-through index existed it could reflect actual sales. A book which shipped five hundred thousand copies, of which only a hundred thousand copies were sold after 60 or 90 days would show a negative ranking of minus four hundred per cent, whereas a book like *Bone* which shipped ten thousand and which had a sell-through of ten thousand would have a one hundred per cent sell-through rating.

Why does an index like this not exist?

The simple reason is that it is in the best interest of the larger companies and the large distributors to fool you into buying unsaleable comic books. We see this in the proliferation of two, three and four part mini-series, company-wide cross-overs and one-shots. If you have to order a complete story-line, an over-priced graphic novel or a series of over-priced annuals before you are able to see how much or little interest there is in them on the part of your customers then you are more apt to order them in larger quantities. Marvel and DC are investigating sell-through figures, but they are only interested in those figures for internal use. If they know what they fooled you with last year then they will know how to fool you next year. On a percentage basis their track record is pitiful. For every success there are dozens of failures. Everyone shares in the successes, but the failures are yours as retailers alone. You take the loss on them, you pay to store them and you pay taxes on them as inventory.

And the simple reason that this game works is that you don't trust each other. To hear retailers tell it, everyone orders to sell out. No one has a back room full of mainstream landfill. Everyone jealously guards his chart of orders, sales and inventory. So long as that condition persists each of you is isolated. When you over-order a book and are stuck with dozens, scores or hundreds of copies you feel yourself to be stupid, a failure, incompetent.

Unless and until retailers band together and begin to share the hard information of sell-through versus orders you will remain the victims of the hype, the gloss and the glitter. In a theatre of operations as small as the U.K. there is no reason that a network connecting all of the stores could not be formed. Let's take a crisis like the *Turok* #1 fiasco. The book arrives in your stores. It is different from its description in the catalogue. As the situation stands now, each of you phones your distributor individually and asks if the book is returnable. After a period of time word comes down from 'on high' that only a percentage of them are returnable. The basic understanding that is the foundation of the Direct Market has been violated and the solution is unsatisfactory. But the message is clear: like it or lump it, you have to eat a bunch of unsold and unsaleable comics.

If the two hundred shops that make up the UK Direct Market were in communication with

each other, a centrally located store would phone five other stores and each of those stores would phone five stores. A consensus would emerge quickly; this comic book is not as it was described, therefore this comic book is fully returnable. If all two hundred stores, on the same day had returned those *Turok* #1 paying only for those copies that had sold or which the stores chose to keep, it would be one less inventory headache, a book you profited from instead of a book that represents a net loss. Each time that the fundamental rules are broken — when a book is not as it was described or it is more than three months late and that book is not fully returnable — it sets a precedent. And gradually your rights as retailers will be whittled away. And books will only be returnable at the whim of individual publishers. This time you got a gold logo *Turok* #1. Next time you'll get nothing.

You have to trust each other. You have to share information and ideas. You have to have a rock-solid representation of your views. You must insist that the rules be adhered to. You have to reinforce that with collective action. Two or three stores returning a misrepresented or late book don't stand a chance. A hundred and fifty or a hundred and seventy-five stores returning that same book would reinforce the basic rules of the Direct Market and demonstrate that the retail community will not be taken for granted and will not be dictated to.

CBRI and the DL group in the United States are taking the first steps toward uniting those members of the retail community whose interest in the Direct Market is long-term, who care about the comics medium and its future and whose attentions are not directed exclusively towards short-term profit-taking and price gouging but long-term growth and stability; a market-place where books like Jeff Smith's *Bone* will thrive and be widely available and widely read because it is a book of genuine quality, not because it is published by a multinational corporation with an advertising budget in the tens of thousands of dollars. It will take a decade or longer to connect all of those retailers in the U.S. and Canada, separated as they are by thousands of miles of geography. In the U.K. that same process could be completed in a matter of weeks if a collective will began to assert itself.

Once a year you get together for one day on neutral ground. Here. Most retailers go home from retail gatherings depressed and frustrated because apart from a bagful of knick-knacks and gee-gaws and a couple of hours of being lied to by the same company reps who lied to you last year and who will lie to you next year, nothing is accomplished. I recognise in that depression and frustration a need for organisation and collective purpose.

You are not branch managers for a multinational chain of comic book stores who are here for a pep talk and a pat on the back. You are not a press pool covering the Prime Minister's speech to the party faithful who must content yourself with evasive political answers, pie in the sky hype, platitudes, empty promises and feeble excuses. You are not at a self-help seminar where you have paid some would-be guru to teach you how to harness your mind or release your inner potential.

You are the chief executive officers and managers of individual businesses which you own, direct and control. There are many of you here and many more who are a phone call away. You have shared interests, concerns and resources. You should connect with each other in one large group or several smaller groups. You must defend your rights and demand hard answers to hard questions. There are several hard questions for Mr. Bank and Mr. Wayne. If I were a retailer I'd be asking them about the failures and flops of the past year instead of listening to the empty promises and hype for next year. And when their answers come back sounding like the rationalisations and empty excuses of impotent politicians who avoid explaining why everything is getting worse instead of better as they had promised, I would turn my back on them, walk out on them and talk instead with my natural allies, other retailers, and begin to build a strong and interactive network, exchanging names, phone numbers, fax numbers and addresses so that next year instead of facing a room full of intimidated and uncertain individuals, the Direct Market politicians would face instead a united front of United Kingdom Retailers who do not ask, but instead demand to be full and equal partners in the marketplace where the greatest risks are on their collective shoulders and where no success is possible without their contribution.

The words of the American War of Independence apply to you here today. 'If you do not hang together you shall surely hang separately.'

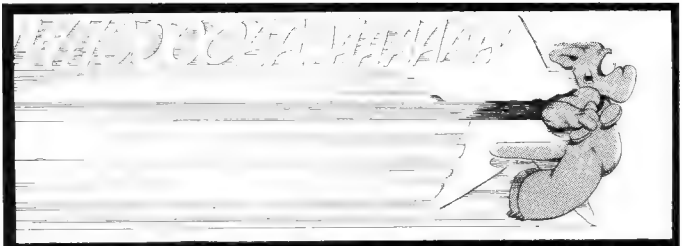
Thank you for your time and attention.

—Dave Sim

"Aardvarks Over UK Tour '93" T-shirts and posters are available from:
STEPHEN HOLLAND
c/o Fantastic Store
48, Friar Lane, Nottingham, ENGLAND NG1 6DQ

The T-shirts, white on black are available for $17 plus $5 postage and handling.
The posters are available for $5 plus $2 for postage and handling.
Make checks payable to Stephen Holland.

Also available: T-shirt of the last page of *Cerebus* 100 (Cirin's first appearance) with motto 'One Big Mother'. Same price as UK Tour T-shirt.



FANS

Have you ever tried to find the Cerebus reprint volumes in your local comic store, only to get nothing but a shrug from the manager?

RETAILERS

Are you always asking your distributor for the Cerebus reprint volumes, only to get nothing but a blank stare?

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AKA BOOKS & COMICS EDINBURGH

AARDVARK OVER UK TOUR '93

PHOTO BY GERHARD AND GERHARD'S CAMERA

22 SEPTEMBER. CROSSING BACK INTO ENGLAND WITH OUR IAN (IAN WELLER) WHO DESERVES A MEDAL FOR DRIVING THE TWO OF US FROM GLASGOW TO ABERDEEN, FROM ABERDEEN TO EDINBURGH AND FROM EDINBURGH TO NEWCASTLE UPON-TYNE. LET'S ALL RAISE A PINT TO OUR IAN. CHEERS, IAN

Two thousand CROWNS.

Across from Victor Reid sat Mike Prosserman with a duplicate of the contract which now vibrated noticeably in Victor's hand. Some time before, the two had begun a tour through the densely packed type of the draught agreement. Prosserman was Victor's guide, reading each passage aloud and unravelling the interwoven

complexities of the contract's legalese for the author's benefit. The agreements which Victor had signed with House of Shadows had been a mere page in length, consisting of a deadline for delivery of the finished 'product', an agreed-upon date for payment and the amount of that payment. If the House of Shadows contract said simply, 'Here, Victor, this is a red rose and this is a yellow rose', then the Vertigo Horse contract was a horticultural history lesson which encompassed and contained all manner of explications of floral differences and niceties. The garden was vast and complex, indeed, and like the dutiful freshman student he was, Victor had applied himself with solemn visage and furrowed brow to seeking after a true understanding of each clause, each variation, each subtle distinction between legalistic stigma, style, sepal and stamen. Prosserman, for his part, spoke slowly and thoughtfully as the two of them regarded, metaphorically, each new flower bed in its numerical turn.

'Ah,' Victor would say. Or 'mm.' Or 'I see.'

In truth, he retained little of Prosserman's laborious explanations of foreign licensing, ancillary rights, translation, reversion clauses or the various so forths and so on's. But flower bed by flower bed Victor had persevered and, as a new self-awareness of the extent and completeness of his ignorance threatened, at any moment, to quite overwhelm him, his various rejoinders became ever more earnest and enthusiastic.

'Ah, yes, of *course,*' Victor would say. Or 'Mm. That makes a great deal of sense.' Or 'I *see.* I see *exactly.*'

He had already decided that he would go through the contract later that night, at home, with a dictionary at his side. He would endeavour to translate it, word by word, into the language with which he earned his livelihood.

The charade had continued through the first several pages. Hopelessly lost and cast adrift in a veritable sea of unfamiliar verbiage, Victor had begun reacting to each new piece of intelligence less like a novice pupil and more in the manner of a devoted seminarian experiencing a long-awaited epiphany. He smiled serenely, nodding slowly and sagely in rhythm with Prosserman's droning cant: as if the heavens themselves had opened and the light of sweet reason shone down for Victor and for Victor alone.

Until paragraph twenty-three.

Though unaware of it, Prosserman now proceeded in solitude through the complex and interconnected maze of the Vertigo Horse jurisprudential garden. Victor, transfixed, gazed open-mouthed and enraptured at the biggest, most beautiful and sweetest-smelling blossom he had encountered in his thirty-odd years of existence.

Two THOUSAND crowns.

Victor's eyes had continued to play across those three words. Each, in its turn, had seemed to blossom and swell, growing to gargantuan, nearly inconceivable proportions on the page before him.

TWO thousand crowns.

Victor was vaguely aware of the publisher's voice, which seemed to be coming to him from a great distance. Prosserman stood before a large and complicated flower bed and was just beginning to explain the linkage between that flower bed, the previous flower bed and their joint relationship to the entirety of the Great Garden when The Three Words chose that moment to merge into a unified concept in Victor's mind.

TWO! . . . THOUSAND! . . . CROWNS!

'When do I get paid?' Victor blurted out — The Three Words having dashed his carefully crafted thespian demeanour of studious understanding upon the rocks of avaricious urgency.

'Uh. As soon as the contract is signed,' answered Prosserman, taken somewhat aback by the desperate gaze of a very different Victor Reid from the individual who, mere instants before, had been so thoroughly absorbed in the intricacies which governed subsequent printings and their relationship to the reversion clauses. 'Naturally, you'll want to consult your solicitor before you . . .'

Prosserman's thought was unfinished, as Victor had fairly leapt to a nearby writing desk and, having seized a pen, had proceeded to inscribe his signature upon the draught agreement with such ferocity that he had managed to tear a small hole in the paper while dotting the 'i' in 'Reid'.

Victor had then turned upon Prosserman so quickly that the publisher, fearing a physical assault, had instinctively blocked his face with his right forearm. When no blow was struck, Prosserman lowered his arm; and there was Victor, back in his chair, his eyes darting between Prosserman's face and the contract, which now rested on the coffee table between them.

Prosserman opened his mouth to say something. And closed it. Opened his mouth to say something. And closed it.

Sighing, the publisher withdrew a small chequebook from his inside pocket and, neatly and carefully, filled out the particulars. He handed the cheque to Victor, who thrust it into his own inside pocket, where he could feel the radiance from it spreading warmth across his chest, ribs and shoulder. Prosserman stood and shook hands with Victor and said that he would send a messenger the next day to arrange for a meeting between Victor and a Vertigo Horse editor.

Fine, Victor had said, fine, fine, fine. Victor had then bitten his bottom lip lest the stream of 'fines' become a raging torrent of 'fines'. Four 'fines' were quite sufficient. Victor did not wish to seem unprofessionally overeager.

Victor raced from Prosserman's suite to his own room, threw Victoria Reis' name tag into the garbage, hurriedly packed his valise and, summoning the bellman, asked him to arrange for a cab. No, Victor amended, smiling: a carriage. He tipped the bellman a crown outside the front doors of the Regency.

The bellman was still thanking him profusely as the carriage swung smoothly out onto the sweeping boulevard.

I'm rich, thought Victor.

I'm rich, I'm rich, I'M RICH!

Suddenly, it seemed, there were no more Black Days in the life of Victor Reid.

It was as if the entirety of his existence to that point had been an elaborate sham or a not terribly funny practical joke: or a series of tests of his stamina and perseverance in the face of overwhelming opposition. Having passed this lifelong series of tests, he had (evidently) graduated *magna cum laude* in some ethereal, otherworldly College of Genuine Merit and was now to be rewarded, it seemed, at every turn.

A magnificent townhouse with a spectacular view of the Upper City had come on the market just as Victor had decided to become a homeowner. The current owner was emigrating to the Sepran Empire and had given Victor a ridiculously good price on the house and its contents: antique, hand-woven T'capmin rugs; paintings; sculptures; marble end tables; hand-carved settees; a massive oak dining-room set; a canopied bed which had been owned, previously, by Baskin, the highest-ranking government official in Palnu apart from Lord Julius himself. The inventory list had run to nearly a dozen pages and Mr. Chartwell, himself, at the bank, had volunteered to arrange the terms of Victor's mortgage. While it was true that Victor had had to spend the better part of a morning and afternoon saying, 'Ah', 'mm', and 'I see' while signing his name to an inch-high stack of official-looking documents, the entire process had been, in the main, effortless. His account was two hundred and fifty crowns lighter, true, but his monthly payments for the house and contents were a mere twenty-one crowns.

Most nights, Victor would arrive at the *Bull & Finch* and buy a round of drinks for the house. Where once he had been something of a pariah, moodily sipping his cognac in a rear booth, he now found himself the center of a wide circle of close friends, much-admired and well-loved. While it was true that his *previous* companions were now quite aloof in his presence, Victor soon realized that this reflected simple jealousy on their part over his good fortune. However, this was all for the best, as these former friends would have been (quite naturally) uncomfortable in the company Victor now kept: important, wealthy, interesting people (very much like himself), who were proving invaluable. They helped him to find the 'right' tailor, the 'right' restaurants, the 'right' import grocer and so on. While Victor was a quick study in these areas, finding all of the 'right' *accoutrements* to complement his new station in life had forced him to postpone his meeting several times with his Vertigo Horse editor. It seemed whenever he had set aside the time to begin sifting through his *Ascension* notes, invariably two or more of his new friends would arrive on his doorstep, unannounced, and the rest of the evening would pass into the early morning hours, filled to overflowing with good drink, good food, and important, wealthy and interesting conversation.

At last, with a large twinge of regret, as the deadline for his fourth postponed meeting bore down on him, Victor announced to his would-be visitors that it was Time to Write. This piece of intelligence being greeted with no little anxiety, vehement protest and many attempted persuasions to the contrary, Victor took as a testament to the solidity of the genuine esteem in which he was now held.

Ascension was to be a ten-part series: Victor's longest work to-date. He had the unmistakable impression that Terim herself had taken a hand in guiding his life and that the sixteen years which had brought him to this point had served as a mere prelude to this one large work. The fortunes of Cirinism and Kevillism had risen and fallen over the previous centuries in regular and reasonably well-documented patterns, but each previous Ascension, or illusory Ascension, had unsettled those patterns. Where Victor had seen this, previously, as a strange quirk in the Iestan histories of the two systems of belief, he had now come to regard the Upper City

and its geological peculiarities as more central to the issues at hand than he had previously surmised. His sudden wealth, his attachment to a large and influential publishing concern, his comfortable surroundings seemed like a nest of sorts; the expanded parameters of the project itself a manifestation of this serendipitous sanctuary. He had not chosen, but had *been* chosen, to document the history of the war between the Universal Female and the Matriarchal Deity.

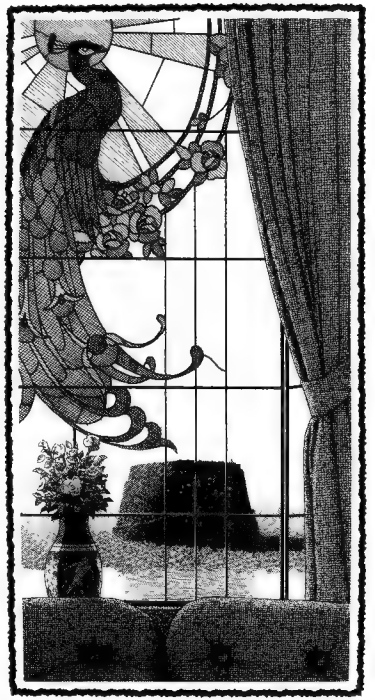
Having documented women (or rather, Woman) for sixteen years, Victor had spent surprisingly little time in their company. Although he had had more than his fair share of sexual 'conquests' (most particularly in the immediate aftermath of the breakup of his marriage) and had, intermittently, deluded himself that he was in love, most of these circumstances had played themselves out over a period of weeks or, occasionally, months. Though each woman in his life had claimed to be different with small similarities, in Victor's experience women were all the same, with minor differences. It was this observation which had first compelled him to write about them, eschewing the misguided chivalry of his contemporaries (whose female characters were, invariably, heroines in every sense of the word: creatures with the physical characteristics of women, but only distantly related to their real-world counterparts) for a more factual and pragmatic portrayal based on observation and commonality.

In the period of weeks that followed the signing of his contract, as Victor postponed, time and again, his first meeting with his Vertigo Horse editor, Milieu had become a frequent visitor to his townhouse. A year younger than himself, she was an acquaintance of many years' standing whom he had first met with his then-wife on an extended promotional tour nearly a decade before. Like the legion of neo-Kevillists who inhabited the incestuous wee world of reads publishing, she took advantage of their infrequent meetings at various social gatherings to engage him in verbal fisticuffs. Neo-Kevillist debate was nothing if not predictable. It began with a challenge (which Victor met easily), continued with rhetorical misdirection (which Victor pointed out), switched to coy flirtation (which Victor pursued or ignored, depending on his inclination), slowed to whining protest or sullen repetition (which Victor demolished in the case of the former and countered in the latter) and ground to a halt in aggrieved petulance (which was Victor's signal to get another cognac). Almost ten years to the day of their first meeting, Victor had found himself in Milieu's company once more. They were both divorced and she, having run the aforementioned course in neo-Kevillist rhetorical reflex in the first hour (which was always interspersed with compliments on Victor's abilities as a writer — a futile attempt at disarmament), had actually, in uncharacteristic fashion, begun to listen to what he had to say.

She had after a time, volunteered her services as an unpaid research assistant on *Ascension*. The price being right, Victor had agreed and soon Victor's second-floor study (which had a magnificent view of the Upper City from across the Feld River, a large bay window with leaded glass, a curved window-seat seat with maroon velvet cushions and hand-carved interwoven vine leaves in the mahogany wainscoting) began filling up with every available account of the previous Ascensions, cross-referenced with corresponding histories of Cirinism, Kevillism and their attendant predecessors, heresies and factions. She stayed late many nights, discussing her latest finds and noting suggestions for other documentation and where it might be found — she drinking blush wine (Pink Infidel, which Victor now ordered by the case) and he drinking cognac. Their discussions would often veer from *Ascension* to the lives of various authors, illustrators, editors and publishers of their mutual acquaintance. This was an element of female nature that Victor now saw that he had missed in his more distanced observation. Gossip, which had never interested him, now began to dominate his thoughts even as he was attempting to focus on *Ascension*.

It wasn't the gossip per se that interested him. Victor had long ago come to the conclusion that every human being (Victor included) had a closet which contained a few — more often than not, several — skeletons. These, like women, tended to be tedious in their similarity and, apart from slight gradations in the colouring of their lurid details, uninteresting in the extreme. Alcoholism, drug addiction, pedophilia, prostitution, gambling, homosexuality, bisexuality, infidelity and cuckoldry (which Victor referred to as Mr. and Mrs. Infidelity); the only thing which would have surprised Victor would be verification that anyone of his acquaintance had had no experience with one or more of these, in either thought, deed or both.

The Gossip Book (or *Côte d'Azur* as it was now known) had had its genesis in these conversations with Milieu. She had told him one night about a prominent editor who had become pregnant by her husband and who had chosen to have an abortion rather than bear the child. Victor was aware that there were more than enough avenues in modern Estarcion for terminating a pregnancy and, though hardly commonplace, such things were scarcely the stuff of scandal. The difference in this case was that the woman in question had decided to forgo the traditional visit to one of the well-known Kevillist



bastions (where like-minded ideologues cheerfully performed the service in question) and had, instead, permitted her daughter and a few of her medical student friends to perform the necessary ministrations.

Victor, after Milieu had left, had jotted the pertinent details into his notebook and had sat contemplating the words long into the night. He had then jotted down the details of another story: a Kevillist illustrator of his acquaintance who seemed not to be able to set foot outside her door without becoming the victim of unwanted and pressing sexual advances but who had drawn a caricature of herself for Victor (some years before she became a vocal authority on the subject), which she had inscribed, 'I looked on the loss of my virginity as a career move.' Gossip. Reality and portrayal. 'Everyone is normal until you get to know them,' he had noted at the bottom of the page.

After several days of contemplation, as *Ascension* sat untouched and Milieu's research materials piled up around him, Victor had come to a slow realisation about the theme which bound these stories together. These episodes (and the others he had jotted down) expressed a spirit of excess which was inherent in Kevillist doctrine.

'Choice above all' was a signpost on the road to madness.

During one of their late-night conversations, he had broached the subject of *Côte d'Azur* to Milieu. He had discussed the possible implications with her and had outlined, briefly, the short story upon which it was based, to which he would be paying indirect ***homage:*** *La Côte Basque.* The author had been a favourite of Victor's, though the story wasn't one of his best. Apart from evening a few scores and long-held grudges, the descriptions had been too precise, leaving no doubt as to the identity of their real-life counterparts; the incidents recounted had been exaggerated for literary effect, taking the story out of the realm of literature and fact-based gossip and into the outer reaches of distortion and outright falsehood. After publication, one of the principal figures in the story had committed suicide. The author himself had been ostracized by Privileged Society for violating the confidences of a few of its members. He had died a few years later, a hopeless alcoholic, alone, unmourned and unloved.

'You're insane,' she had said after exhaling a thin stream of cigarette smoke. She had grown thoughtful then and for several silent moments Victor had tried, without success, to read her thoughts in her inscrutable features.

'Leave me and my family out of it,' she concluded, and they had returned to discussing *Ascension.*

Thereafter, Milieu became more cautious, for a time, about telling Victor ***anything.*** New information about her family dried up like a rain puddle on a sunny afternoon (which was an unexpected benefit; Victor had always found women excessive when it came to the subject of their blood relations, usually to the exclusion of any subject of genuine and general interest). From time to time, she would greet him with a cheery 'Hey, I think I have a story for your read,' but even the best of these had a numbing and pointless sameness about them. An illustrator who was intending to reveal his bisexuality, who was employed by a publishing company known to be strictly homophobic (a neo-Kevillist term of recent vintage); a prominent retailer who had been carrying on an illicit affair for some years; another friend who had revealed herself as a lesbian and who was now happily and traditionally married.

So, Victor tried gossip himself.

He began having more conversations with women at convocations and signings. He had a sixteen-year inventory of little-known facts and unsubstantiated rumours about many authors and illustrators of his acquaintance and found that, in this strange new world, this represented a comparable kind of wealth to that which his advance payment for *Ascension* represented in the material world.

'Gossip cleaves,' he had written in his notebook one night.

In both senses of the word, gossip brought women together and gossip tore them apart from one another. Previously, he would hear an unpleasant story about a woman from an ostensible friend of hers and merely think it odd. Now he would trade a tidbit for a tidbit and found, to his surprise, that he was soon locked in earnest conversation with someone who was a complete stranger, or, at best, a casual acquaintance. The laying bare of the private life of another created an illusion of intimacy, in some strange female manner. The sharing of another's confidences became a peculiar sort of binding mechanism. Certain forms had to be observed. 'I'm not supposed to tell anyone this' or the more disingenuous 'I've never told anyone this' were the pro forma salutations. The conversation had to be punctuated with disclaimers: 'Don't get me wrong, I really love Mrs. Such and So, I think the world of her, but . . .'

The specific confidences went in one of Victor's ears and beat a hasty retreat out of the other. But he found the experience to be compelling in the extreme. What gossip brought together, gossip would, inevitably, rend asunder. A good story would spread like wildfire and the compulsive gossip soon found herself (or himself — until he got the hang of it, Victor found himself the victim of many a frosty share from unexpected quarters) caught in the back draught. Very

often the correspondent assumed greater importance than the gossip itself. 'Who told you that?' was not a question to be taken lightly. Within female ranks, selective and opportune amnesia was widespread to the point of being endemic. Victor began to understand more fully why it was that two women who had been fast friends at one dinner party could appear to be mortal enemies at the next.

Gossip, he speculated, had its origins in traditional matriarchal society, where it functioned as a self-policing instrument. There was a distinct and inviolable set of rules which governed the behaviour of the Good Wife and Mother. Any behaviour which fell outside of these clearly defined guidelines, any thought or deed which was not explicitly sanctioned, was implicitly forbidden. The deeply ingrained urge towards shared confidence as a pre-requisite (and most often the substance) of female intimacy ensured that transgressors were soon found out. Their sordid confession to a trusted friend soon became universal female knowledge and ostracism and disgrace soon followed. The Bad Wife and Mother was made an example of, her subsequent unhappy and isolated existence serving as a warning and a deterrent to those likewise tempted and a living testimony to the immaculate purity of the maternal society which had cleansed itself of these malignancies. Though the remaining society was doubtless riddled with transgressors, the example also served to make them see the wisdom in keeping their transgressions to themselves: their fear of discovery and the burden of guilt (without any possibility of confession or release) serving as suitable punishment. Illusion, thus reinforced, became reality.

Kevillism had divided women's minds into warring factions. Choice, obviously, implied choosing. What purpose could there be living in a world which was a smorgasbord of options if one didn't at least sample those alternatives which one found personally attractive? There yet existed (and exists) a need for intimacy between and among females, an urge toward collective interest and collective awareness. Kevillism had served to fracture that interest and that awareness into many interests and many awarenesses. This Kevillist faction might deplore divorce and advocate infidelity; another might deplore infidelity and advocate sequential marriages; still another might deny infidelity as an outmoded concept and advocate many simultaneous relationships. Some advocated lesbianism exclusively, some bisexuality, some heterosexuality exclusively.

Victor knew of one Kevillist who had been ostracized from a group which deplored simultaneous relationships (bisexual or lesbian), who found herself a kindred spirit of a group which advocated bisexual simultaneous relationships, only to be cast out along with her lesbian partner when they chose to become faithful and exclusive life-mates. Whereupon she was left high and dry when her faithful and exclusive life-mate, exercising her own absolute freedom of choice, chose to become a respectable and traditional wife and mother.

In short, Kevillism and its credo of 'choice above all' had, by implication, made any working definition of it impossible. The single ideology that bound Kevillists together ensured that Kevillism itself could not exist except as fragmented, amorphous, ever-changing subgroups consisting of no more than a handful of individuals. Each time these individuals made another choice (and since choice was the thing — the only thing — which defined a Kevillist, the temptation to make new choices was irresistible), they were ostracized by one subgroup and absorbed by another.

As Victor contemplated this conclusion, he was struck by the fact that, structurally, this was the most effective and natural means of developing an underground political cell system — which was the very foundation of Astoria's revolutionary politics. As the individual cells purified themselves (ostracism), they multiplied and became more efficient. Perhaps efficient wasn't the word, but they certainly became more infectious, more virulent.

'Choice above all.'

'Gossip cleaves.'

Victor pulled out a fresh sheet of paper and dipped his quill.

Perhaps *Côte d'Azur* wasn't a separate work at all. Perhaps it was the thematic core of *Ascension* that had been eluding him.

A few days later, Victor sat thumbing through a clean copy of the finished instalment. He had not been to the *Bull & Finch* since the wonderful moment that he had decided to incorporate *Côte d'Azur* into *Ascension*. He had slept only four hours a night (this was always the surest sign that his writing was going well; when things were going badly he would sleep anywhere from nine to twelve hours), snacking intermittently on bread and cheese that he picked up at the corner grocer's every other day.

The chapter ran to a little over thirty pages in Milieu's distinctive, looping and decorative script (in addition to the research she did, she was also a consummate proofreader; in restaurants she would scan the menu for typographical errors and then, only as an afterthought, for a potential meal). He considered offering again to pay her for her services. Judging by their recurrence in his

first draughts, a rate based upon misplaced semi-colons and hyphens might prove extremely lucrative. She seemed content, however, with original printings of his earlier works, which he kept in scrupulous disorder in a cabinet in his library (the library itself was formerly a kitchen; Victor intended a complete remodelling at some future date, having accomplished the important task of performing a counter-, sink- and stove-ectomy as sacrificial homage to the Gods of Anti-domesticity), and with serving as a kind of ideological scratching-post when overindulgence in the depths of fermented waters brought forth the misogynistic claws of Rotsieve (the anti-Victor). On a handful of occasions she even prepared small meals for the two of them, which Victor grimly regarded as infinitely better than the overpriced fare which was served in the 'right' restaurants. She had arrived one day to find the larder purged of her gastronomic infiltrators, and Victor hard at work, a small plate of bread slices and flavourless cheese within his reach. She had made no inquiry and, consequently, Victor preferred no explanation.

Now that the critical chapter had been accomplished and the rough outline (which ran to several pages) had been modified to accommodate it, Victor felt no need to postpone his meeting with the Vertigo Horse editor a fifth time. There was apt to be some problem with the fact that the completed instalment, 'Côte d'Azur', was actually the fourth (or more likely the fifth or sixth) in the proposed series, which meant that he would definitely miss the now-extended deadline for delivery of the first part. He was certain (or he at least hoped) that once he was able to explain that the earlier chapters would now be little more than an exercise in construction and foreshadowing, his new publisher would see that everything would unfold smoothly and efficiently from this juncture forward.

The research material sat in a neat stack on his writing desk, all pertinent pages flagged and germane passages underscored. The picture in his mind of his central characters, based on his aunt and his maternal grandmother, was vivid and sharply delineated. He would even use their real names, Elsie and Lillian, with the early chapters taking place in their infancy and childhood; their upbringing would be interwoven with fables and legends which had their origin in the myriad ascensions which had taken place or which were reputed to have occurred in antiquitous times.

He very much looked forward to the jarring transition he intended between the fourth and sixth chapters (his intended central characters having vanished for the entirety of the fifth). At the conclusion of the fourth episode, Elsie and Lil were just beginning their schooling at the age of five or six. The fifth instalment was 'Côte d'Azur' (or perhaps, with a little fleshing out, the last few pages of the fourth, the entirety of the fifth and the first few pages of the sixth). Two new characters (evidently) appear early in the sixth, two women in their dotage, reminiscing about their lives. It is only in the last few pages of the sixth episode (or perhaps the first few pages of the seventh) that a recollection, a shared recollection, of an incident from their earliest childhood reveals them as the wayward Elsie and Lillian. The intervening years (some thirty or forty) would be filled in as they engage in far-ranging conversations centered upon the dramatic changes Kevillism had brought about in their lifetime. Lillian would regret all of the choices and possibilities she had by-passed in choosing to become a traditional wife and mother, and, living vicariously through her Kevillist daughters and granddaughters, would be an uncritical proponent of Astoria's quiet revolution. Elsie, who had taken full advantage of the emergent possibilities at various critical junctures in her adulthood, would feel that these had, ultimately, made her existence an unhappy one and so would deplore what she regarded as the endless worsening in the quality of female lives. Lillian would make the undiplomatic observation that it was Elsie's failure and not the failure of Kevillism itself which had led to her unhappiness. This would bring about an irreparable schism between the two and the final chapter would consist of the two of them in respective solitude contemplating their imminent deaths and reflecting upon Astoria herself for the first time. The question implicit in the second half would be: 'Has Kevillism brought about an improvement or a worsening in female lives?' The answer, of necessity and in keeping with all of Victor's previous works, would be ambiguous, with the author himself arguing vociferously and (he hoped) convincingly both the 'yea' and the 'nay' through his characters.

He jotted the words 'yea' and 'nay' on a fresh page in his notebook. After a moment he wrote 'why hierophant-magician' beside the former and 'not magician, why' adjacent to the latter. After a short internal dialogue, he wrote 'chapter seven' above them, and then added a small question mark after the chapter number.

He slid a small stack of notes on various scraps of paper into the pouch affixed to the inside front cover and then closed the notebook, placing it atop the pile of research materials.

Yes, things were going well.

Things were going very well indeed.

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